

## Beacons of the Bible

Ishmael Mocking

By Henry Law

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"Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking." Genesis 21:9

The believer's present heritage is vast and rich. But it is not pure sunshine. He basks indeed beneath the cheering smiles of heaven. But earth eyes him with malignity. As "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." James 4:4; so, God's favor brings the world's hate.

Scripture hides not the fact. They who leave all for Christ, receive an hundred-fold now in this time, with persecutions, "and in the world to come eternal life." Mark 10:30. The warning is clear, "Because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." John 15:19. Blessings from God, and malevolence from man go hand in hand. The blessed must suffer; but they rejoice in suffering and win a crown. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:10-12. This is exemplified in Scripture-story. It has been seen in Cain. It meets us now in Ishmael.

To introduce Ishmael, we must return to Abraham. It is joy and gain to do so. The patriarch's portrait is largely drawn by the Spirit's pencil. It is, therefore, a most precious study. Here, as in a mirror, the *weakness* and the *power* of faith are shown. Sometimes this grace appears as a flickering flame. Sometimes it sinks very low, and seems almost extinct. Then it springs up in giant-strength--brilliant as the noon-day sun. Sometimes it trembles as a reed. Then it defies impossibilities. But being born of God, it never dies. It is divine, and therefore immortal.

Abraham leaves his Chaldean home, armed with a noble promise--cheered by transcendent prospect--"I will make of you a great nation." Genesis 12:2. Strong in this hope, "he went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan he came." Genesis 12:5. But Sarah gives him no heir. Time rolls on.

Year follows year; and he continues childless. The promise tarries; but again and again it glitters in his sight. When he bewails his vacant home, the Lord brings him beneath the starry canopy, and says, "Look up into the heavens and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that—too many to count!" Genesis 15:5. Still fulfillment lingers--no son is born. Faith hangs a weary head. It wavers, and adopts a godless project to attain the end. But human policies help not God's decree. No might can frustrate; no scheming can accelerate His time.

Sarah, to secure offspring, resigns her wedded place to the Egyptian handmaid. The scheme succeeds. The patriarch is a parent. Long space now intervenes. For about fifteen years young Ishmael thrives, the hope and stay of Abraham's house. And now renewed promises delight him. It is announced that aged Sarah shall herself be mother of the heir. Holy joy transports him. But still he clings to Ishmael. "Oh! that Ishmael might live before you!" Genesis 17:18. The prayer for Ishmael is largely answered. But the heirdom shall not be his. Sarah indeed shall bear a son; and with her Isaac the covenant shall be confirmed. God spoke. Who can withstand! The event seemed impossible. Nature's course prohibited. But what can stop Omnipotence! The centenarian Abraham embraces Isaac. The tent of Sarah cradles her offspring.

What joy would now pervade the family! Faith would expand by seeing that God's word must stand. But soon this joy is clouded. While Isaac's years are tender, Sarah has proof of bitter hate in Ishmael. The story simply states--"She saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had borne unto Abraham, mocking." Genesis 21:9.

After long years, the Spirit elucidates that term. He shows that malice soured the heart, and that derisive scorn polluted the first-born's breast. "He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit." Gal. 4:29. Strong feelings agitate the anxious mother. She cries, "Cast out this bond-woman and her son; for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." Genesis 21:10. The fond father hesitates. He has parental love for Ishmael. He would retain him by his side. But God interposes, "In all that Sarah has said unto you, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall your seed be called." verse 12. He obeys. Hagar and the youth are banished. They wander forth into the wilderness. Isaac remains the joy of the house--the heir of the promise--the fountain whence the true Church flows--the progenitor of Him in whom all blessings dwell.

Such is the narrative--attractive in its pure simplicity--abundant in its holy lessons. From every incident a voice strongly cries, 'Act faith in our wonder-working God. Nothing is too large for His love. Nothing is too hard for His power.'

But there is far more than instructive precept here. There is a blaze of spiritual light. The Spirit, by Paul's pen, lifts up a flaming torch, and casts back rays on this early record. Thus illumined, each point jumps forth resplendent in Gospel

truth. The facts remain in all their verity; but each fact becomes a mirror of salvation's scheme.

We here see how wondrous is the Word which chronicles God's wondrous dealing. Behold the annals of one family. They are a world-long story. They image the doings of succeeding ages. They are a seed prolific of vast harvest, while earth remains.

Return to Abraham's house. There are two women--Sarah and Hagar--one is free--the mother of free offspring. The other is a bond-maid--the parent of slaves. But, in these women the Spirit shows the TWO COVENANTS of God with man. The one is the covenant of grace, confirmed and ratified in Christ, which calls to Gospel liberty and life. The other is the covenant of works, which dooms to galling slavery and death.

In the sons we have the diverse seeds which separate mankind. Isaac images the heaven-born family--the sons of grace--the heirs of eternal righteousness in Christ. Ishmael is dark as the type of that sad progeny, the sons of nature, whose only hope centers in self and self's performances. The parallel exhibits the black features of poor nature's seed. They hate the light, and would extinguish it. They persecute the lowly followers of the Lamb, and sincerely would chase them from the earth. The sequel, also, is here foreshown. The slaves of the law are driven away--most wretched outcasts. The Gospel freedmen receive the inheritance of life.

Such is the story in its allegorical intent. Each point claims closer notice. Holy Spirit! draw back the veil! Conduct each reader into the inner sanctuary of Christ's truth! HAGAR represents the dispensation of the LAW. Originally this law is written by God's finger in the heart. On SINAI it is proclaimed anew amid tremendous portents of majesty and awe--in the terrors of thunders--lightnings--and the trumpet's clang. It reveals Jehovah as all glorious in holiness, demanding spotless righteousness from all the sons of men. It is simple, brief, and clear as the light of heaven. It exacts love--perfect and unsullied, without one deviating step. Its edicts stretch from earliest to last breath. It asks obedience in every movement of the mind--in every station, circumstance, and age. Compliance is eternal life. Infringement is inevitable death. It holds a relentless scepter. It exacts life-long and undeviating service.

But it gives no help. Its subjects are weak in nature's weakness--and fettered in the chains of nature's corruptions. It extends no hand to strengthen. It sternly cries, "Do this, or die." It never melts in pity. The voice of pardon is not heard within its realms. It knows no sounds of peace or comfort. Repentance is ignored. The weeping eye--the smitten breast--vows of amended walk, are inexorably repelled. The Law sits unbending on an iron throne. Its slaves are lashed to work. Failure dooms to hopeless misery. Such is the covenant exemplified in Hagar. It is holy and most gloriously righteous. But it frowns terribly on fallen man.

In contrast SARAH shines brightly. She comes forth the emblem of the covenant of GRACE. When midnight darkness seems to cover earth, free favor rises as the morning star. Let thanks be heard. Let praises swell. Let loud thanksgivings fill the courts of heaven. Let grateful hearts pour forth adoring hallelujahs. Grace comes. Man is not left to hopeless bondage under Sinai's law. Another compact is made in heaven. Of this Christ is the sum--the substance--the glorious whole. He undertakes to be its surety. All that the Sinaitic Covenant demands, He will perform. All the dread penalties, so justly claimed, He will undergo. All on whom His Father's love shines savingly, He receives as members of Himself. They are contained in Him. He is the Head--they are the body. For them He lives. For them He is obedient. For them He dies. He *represents* them in His life--His death--His rising from the grave--His session at God's right hand. Glorious Covenant! Worthy of the Father, who decrees! Worthy of the Son, who undertakes! Worthy of the Spirit, who applies! Throughout grace reigns!

It is a covenant of liberty--of joy--of peace--of hope--of holiness. All, who by faith embrace it, are free to all extent of freedom--free from the terrors of the curse--the dread of hell--the frown of God. They rejoice as heirs of heaven and endless bliss. They float on the waves of an ocean of peace--peace, with God reconciled--peace, with conscience lulled. They glory in hope of the glory of God. By the Spirit's mighty power and indwelling strength, they adorn the Gospel by most holy living. They blossom and bear precious fruit. Trees of righteousness--planted by the Lord--tended by his constant care.

Hagar in nature's strength bears Ishmael. There is no marvel. There is no deviation from accustomed course. Sarah, against all hope, by virtue of God's promise, by intervening wonder, gives birth to Isaac.

Such are the two divisions of mankind. One race is wholly Natural--born after nature's mode. They live as men according to the flesh. Their thoughts--their feelings--their desires--their hopes, look not beyond this world's horizon. They rise not above its low level. Under the covenant of works they live--they die--they meet the judgment-seat.

The other race is wholly SPIRITUAL. They are the sons of God's eternal promise. They are born indeed in nature's wilderness, and in the prison-house of the law. But the Spirit in due time marvelously visits them. He gives them a new nature--new desires--new hopes--new powers--new prospects. By His own power He opens their eyes to see their natural condition--their ruin under the Law--the beauty of Christ's finished work--their full deliverance in Him. He imparts faith to flee to Him--to cleave to Him--to love Him--to serve Him. They are no more carnal, "but spiritual." They come out from the world and are separate. To God they live. To God they die. Such are the two seeds. Ishmael and Isaac are their types.

Of old it was declared, that ENMITY was put between them. So it ever has been. So it ever will be. Ishmael soon showed malicious hate of his young brother. His race still lives and hates. The annals of the Church are stained with persecution in each page. If power equaled the will, the godly would long since have been extinct, and Christian truth been cast into outer darkness. Let holy prophets give their witness. What was their crime? They told of God--His will--His truth. They warned of evil. They counseled to reform. Therefore hatred assailed them, cruelty tormented them, and they were hunted, as foes of man, from earth.

Let martyrs in noble army move forward. They appear galled with irons--lashed with scourges--branded with every indignity--perishing amid all torments--victims of savage cruelties. But what was their guilt? They firmly maintained the truth of Christ. They resolutely scorned to bow to idols. They dared to shout amid the flames, "None but Jesus." On the rack they gloried in Christ's cross. Therefore the Ishmaels persecuted.

Let Jesus Himself be seen. He walks this earth the incarnate God. Perfect love dwelt on His lips, and moved in His every step. What is His welcome? Let the judgment-hall--let Calvary reply. Ah! sin of sins! Enmity could not evince more spite. Malice could not inflict more torturing pains. Abhorrence could not invent more ignominious death. The apostles follow. The enmity is not less keen. The sure word still finds fulfillment, "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2 Tim. 3:12. Restrictions may repress overt acts. But the same spirit lives. The inner feeling in every Ishmael's breast is enmity. The dragon chained is still a dragon. Satan, released from his millennial chain, shall not be softened. 'Holy Father, hasten the time when they shall not hurt nor destroy in all your holy mountain! When your sons shall wear one garb--use one tongue--breathe one climate of love! Hear our cry. Your Name is Love.'

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